

*SUBMISSION TO THE COMMITTEE OF GOVERNMENT
REPRESENTATIVES ON CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION*

RESPONSE TO THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS:
Reflecting the Values and Interests of Canadians
in Northumberland County, Ontario

A Document Developed by Participants of
"The Future of Main Street Northumberland
Free Trade Area of the Americas and You"

Forum Sponsors:
Horizons of Friendship
Cobourg Family YMCA International Committee
Northumberland Community Coalition
Northumberland Labour Council
Aber Ecological Consulting Limited

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For More Information, Contact:

Rick Arnold
Horizons of Friendship
P.O. Box 402, 50 Covert Street
Cobourg, Ontario, CANADA
K9A 41-1
Tel: (905) 372-5483
Fax: (905) 372-7095
Email: ra mold @horizons. ca

Dr. Shirley Conover
Aber Ecological Consulting Ltd
7415 McAllister Road. R.R. #2
Bewdley, Ontario, CANADA
K0L 1 E0
Tel: (905) 342-3546
Fax: (905) 342-2414
Email: aberecl@eagle.ca

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately forty individuals from Northumberland County, Ontario Canada gathered in February 1999 for a two-day forum to explore the implications of free trade, and specifically the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), on smaller, rural communities - namely Northumberland County communities, and their counterparts in Central America. Discussions covered four main areas: agriculture & rural livelihoods; job security; health, education & welfare; and environment.

The Forum demonstrated that:

- Canadian experience with free trade to date has generated a number of causes for concern for Canada and the 33 other potential trading partners, especially for the smaller or economically-weaker countries.
- Canadians are concerned that economic liberalization and corporate agendas have dominated the design of free trade agreements to date. Much greater attention will need to be paid to the needs, aspirations and social welfare of the citizens of all 34 states.
- In spite of the differences between the 34 FTAA countries, the forum demonstrated that there are many problems and concerns in common.
- Care must be taken to ensure that socio-economic issues are dealt with consistently and fairly within a future agreement, no matter the size, population, or relative power of the countries involved.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Comprehensive studies be conducted on the impacts of existing free trade agreements. These studies to include input from all sectors and ages of society, through participatory processes with citizens of all countries.
2. The process of negotiation be open and democratic where information is disseminated to all citizens and where the voices of civil society from all participating countries are incorporated.
3. International principles and standards be established in all aspects of the proposed agreement, including agriculture, environment, labour, health, welfare, education. Wherever possible, these principles and standards be incorporated into the body of the agreement, rather than in sidebar agreements.
4. All possible measures be taken to ensure that governments retain sovereignty over decisionmaking processes.
5. The FTAA clearly be supportive of an equitable distribution of wealth. Efforts be made to address the imbalance of power between rich and poor nations, and those same disparities within nations. The debt of Southern nations be cancelled to establish a more level playing field between all participating states.
6. Accessible and effective appeal structures and dispute resolution mechanisms be put in place and made available to all affected bodies.
7. Social, environmental and sustainable development principles be integrated with economic guidelines.
8. The FTAA integrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with trade principles in the interests of all citizens in the hemisphere.
9. An accountability system be established to ensure that the implementation of the FTAA agreement adheres to the terms of the final negotiations.

The forum participants clearly recommended that Canada should be negotiating a "FAIR TRADE" agreement which implies a strong human dimension to the economics of "free trade". Canada and all participating nations should be operating on the premise that the economy must serve society.